

ENVOI
by
A PATHOLOGIST

*In a full medical life
I have sought to understand
Why people die
Not the simple things
Like bodies crushed
In accidents
Or dying suddenly
With bullets in their brains
Or choked with chemical dust
Or drowned.*

*Rather to find
Why ordinary people die
Their bodies worn out
And suddenly become incompetent.*

*So have I travailed
Over the years
And sought the answer
Each death
A problem to be solved
Hoping each problem understood
Would bring some knowledge
To prevent the same thing
Happening again.*

*With expertise
I carved
Each sterno-clavicular joint
With care
Cracked each and every rib
Exposed the thorax
Fondled every heart*

*Transected every lung
Sought out the thymus
Examined every lymph-node
Drew down the larynx
Tonsils and glottis
Weighed the thyroid
Found the parathyroids,
With care
I sectioned the abdomen
Carved gently the liver
And sought to find
If bile ducts were intact*

*Or whether some abstruse condition
Had altered
The content of the tissue.*

*Each kidney was split in half
Cortex and medulla compared
The volume of the pelvices
The patency of the ureters
All were sought
To further diagnosis.*

*Adrenals, testes, ovaries,
Pancreas, all contributed
their tiny quota
of evidence.*

*The brain
Wherein we thought
The final evidence
Would be found
Was specially prepared
But though we sought
We found but little
to explain
final catastrophe.*

*In Mrs. X.
We seemed to find
An answer
to our quandary.*

*But Mrs. Y.
Had much more wrong
Yet somehow managed
To survive
Her heart was worn
Her kidneys far from normal
Her liver had no cause
to function
Her brain was small
No longer than her rival
And yet she lived
More joyfully and longer
Until she died
Beneath a bus.*

*And so I wonder
If our facile explanations
Are quite as valid
As we seem
To make them
And whether
Individuals
Have not some say
In how
Their various diseases
Affect them.*

Professor Sir John Henry Biggart, Professor of Pathology (1938-1971)—Dean of the Faculty of Medicine (1944-1971) of Queen's University, Belfast, died 21st May, 1979. This was found among his papers and the Journal welcomes the opportunity to publish it.